1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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County Clare

241 As regards the smaller crops "the small farmers show a distinct preference for cabbage and rye. . . ." [6]

"Poultry are influenced more than any other class of livestock by size of the farm. . . . They are nine times as dense on holdings of 1 to 30 acres as on holdings over 200 acres. . . . counties densest in poultry coincide with the counties densest in small holdings. . . ." [7]

231 Pigs, however, "seem to be influenced more by densities of tillage and of milch cows than by size of holdings. . . . The Southwestern Counties [Clare is one of them] have dense pig herds and the largest bacon factories." [8]

241 ● 407 The difference reflects itself likewise in the distribution of agricultural implements and machinery over the two types of farm. The figures, dating from 1917,[9] are two decades old, but, in spite of the subsequent increase in mechanization, Irish farming is little given to abundant use of machines, and proportions hold much as at that time. In the words of the Report in discussing the tables it presents, giving numbers of farm implements and machines, enumerating ploughs, harrows, turnip and mangel sowers, corn binders, mowers and reapers, horse-drawn hayforks, and potato diggers per thousand acres of ploughed land or specific crop, on various sized holdings:

> The figures rise regularly to a maximum (in the column representing holdings of 50 to 100 acres) and then fall away regularly. Small figures for the small holdings presumably mean that the less efficient implements are used, (the spade in place of the plough, the scythe instead of the mower), not that co-operation . . . exists to any appreciable extent.[10]

That large holders do not proportionately increase their use of such implements and machines after the 50 to 100 acre maximum is reached lies in the fact that "the small

[6] *Agricultural Statistics, 1847–1926*, pp. xxvi, xxvii. [9] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*, p. xxvi. [8] *Ibid.*, p. lv.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. lvi. We shall see that this statement is not entirely accurate, though there is no large-scale village coöperation as in Balkan and Slavic lands.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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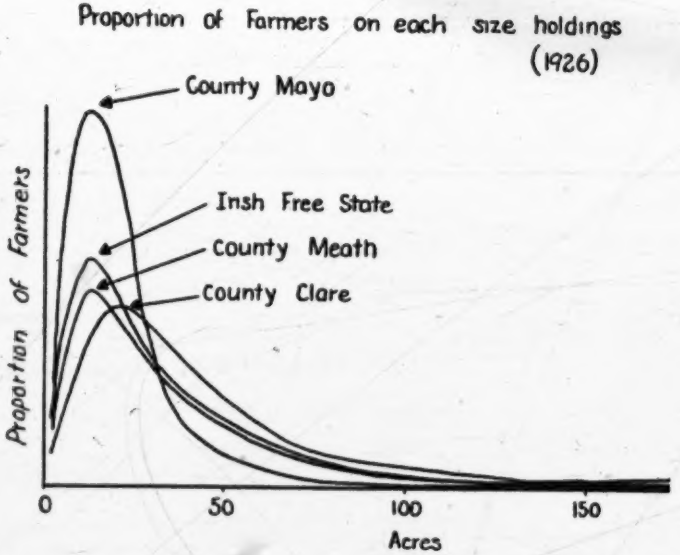
figures for the largest size holdings show that the machines on the smaller farms were more than sufficient for the type of agriculture carried on."[11] For instance, on farms of 30–50 acres there were 137 ploughs to every 1,000 acres of ploughed land. But much less than half that number were

FIGURE 2



sufficient for the same acreage of ploughed land on holdings over 500 acres. The difference reflects itself statistically not only in the goods produced but in the tools and techniques used.

More important, however, for an understanding of the social behavior involved, is a further great difference to be seen in the numbers of persons living upon the various sized farms. The numbers of persons supporting themselves upon the small holdings are much greater than those upon

[11] *Ibid.*

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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221 246 also one that calls forth the united efforts of the whole family. It is a race, too, against time and rainy weather, and every effort must be bent to mow, rake, and let dry, and stack the meadow grasses, first in small haycocks, then in a great hayrick in the haggard, before rain brings rot to the lush crop. The farmers well speak of the harvest as "saving the hay."

221 241 [407 556] No sooner is the hay saved than the corn crops demand attention. Rye and oats are ready for the scythe or the mowing machine (only the larger farmers have reapers) by late August. The farmer and his sons must bind it, stack it, and leave it for several days drying. Later they will return to the fields and cart it back to the haggard for threshing. Not long ago the flail was still the most frequent means of threshing among the small farmers. In recent years steam-[407] powered threshing machines make the rounds, and threshing, which under the older system seems to have taken place as need arose for the grain, takes place now more regularly in late September and early October.

221 241 251 With the bringing in of the corn, the agricultural year draws to a close. Through October and November turnips and mangels are ready to be "pulled" and stored in the fields, near at hand to the haggard, in straw- and earth-covered pits. The potatoes which remain in the ridges must be turned up with spade and plough and similarly stored for the winter. All the root crops are indispensable supplies for men and animals during the months to come when there is no grass. The winter's supply of turf must be brought to the haggard from the reeks alongside of the bogs, where it [492] has been drying for the summer. The carting is an intermittent labor, performed by the men at odd times when they are free of other duties. As winter comes with November cold and rain, the cattle must be housed and made ready 221 231 for the long, dark days of no grass to come; and the farmer is busy with them acquiring and disposing of his stock, as

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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476 lies began to save the hay, mowing it, letting it dry, and
246 stacking it as soon as possible, first into small grass cocks, then into the usual six to eight foot haycocks. After several weeks it would be moved into a single great hayrick in the haggard. There was a great deal of interest and much comment back and forth over the progress of the various families, the probable weather, and the yield of the various meadows. The men seemed to feel a general rivalry to do their work
● [407] well and quickly. About half the families had horse-drawn mowing machines. Those who had them mowed their own meadows as quickly as possible, working from earliest morning as long as light held. They worked with the aid of their sons and with that of boys from the families who had no machines of their own. At each subsequent stage of the harvesting, a boy or young man not a member of the family whose meadow was being worked could be seen giving his labor in aid; he took his place at meals during the day.

The mowing done, the farmer then took his machine to the farmer whose son had helped him and mowed the meadows belonging to his friend. In one instance a youngish farmer mowed the meadows of three others; in another, of two. Certain meadows were full-handed enough not to require extra hands, and in five cases no help was given, though the mowing and stacking took a very long time with them
[589 in comparison to the others, and they were obviously short-
609] handed. Two of these were bachelors who lived alone, and two more were the "strangers." Two other families had insufficient meadow of their own and were forced to buy
[437] hay on the so-called "conacre" system (buying the hay as it stands and reaping it oneself within a stipulated time).

Here then was an example of an important agricultural operation undertaken by the local community in which provision was made (except in five or six cases) for effective coöperation over and above the usual family economy. This is not an isolated instance; in Luogh it has been the practice

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER X.

SEEDTIME.

Except in a few districts where winter wheat is grown the farmer's year may be said to begin in spring when, from February on, the land is ploughed or dug for the new crops. Several arguments are advanced against autumn ploughing—that the land is too wet and that the winter destroys the seed-bed—but as with many other things the preference is best explained by deep-rooted custom. So long as the land was held in rundale autumn ploughing was out of the question since the stock had the run of the whole townland after Hallowe'en.

We have very little information about old Irish ploughs. Owing to the fact that they were made almost entirely of wood archæology cannot help us much, but shaped stones that may have been shares and coulters have been found, and plough-irons do sometimes turn up. The discovery by Dr. O'Neill Hencken of a large iron coulter in the Ballinderry crannog shows that a heavy plough necessitating a big team had reached Co. Westmeath by the 10th century A.D. Pipe-rolls of the 13th century refer to plough teams of 8 oxen in Co. Meath: this was the normal complement under the English three-field system. At the other end of the scale, as it were, there survived into living memory along the west coast the custom of attaching the horse to the plough or harrows by the tail, and although the practice was severely condemned it had the advantage that the horse would stop if the plough

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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241 407 [492] struck a rock, thus saving the share, the traces and the ploughman from injury. The tying of the tail-hair to the traces, which were commonly of sugán or fir rope, required a difficult knot known in later days to very few. This undoubtedly ancient practice seems to have been linked with other customs such as walking backwards before the plough horses, burning the corn in the straw, and plucking or clipping wool from the sheep whenever it was required. It appears that we have in this group of survivals an older culture-laver overlaid by newer methods some of which are themselves of high antiquity. There is some evidence that the original simpler wooden plough mentioned below, together with the clod-breaker and the winnowing tray (Chapter 14) belong to the older layer, whereas the improved wooden plough, the harrow and the flail are later arrivals.

English visitors of the 18th century and the writers of the Statistical Accounts published by the Royal Dublin Society have given many particulars of the varying practices of a century and a half ago. From them we select a few observations. The method of ploughing in Co. Clare was to use four horses abreast, the driver walking backwards between the two middle horses. This is also described as "the old method" in Co. Roscommon. Four oxen were employed in Co. Dublin and Co. Tipperary, "never less than four oxen or four horses" in Kilkenny, six in Meath, three in Fermanagh and two in King's County. The large teams of some regions may imply that co-aration had at one time been practised. [476 171] The four horses of the north Antrim plough-team were contributed or "pooled" by four farmers under the system of "morrowing" or "neighbour dealing," which finds ready parallels in Scotland. In Co. Clare this pooling custom is known as "cooring," and in other parts as "milling." The Irish farm horse, it should be remembered, is a small light breed: except near large towns heavy cart horses are rarely seen.

Nevertheless in the more backward parts the two horse plough seems to have been general, as it is to-day, and it has been supposed that the two-ox plough was standard in early

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Celtic times. I have never seen the wooden plough in use, but I have attempted to reconstruct a drawing (Fig. 43) with the help of discarded specimens and descriptions given by men who have worked with them, and I find that my sketch closely resembles an example in the National Museum of Ireland which I have since examined. It consists of a short "head" fitted with an iron share or sock attached by means of folded flanges like the turf spade or the loy, and also shod with an iron sole-shoe. Into the head is morticed the main handle, in such a way that its left side forms a straight line with the head and with the straight side of the sock. To the main handle are fastened both the "wee handle" and the long "beam" which in turn is keyed to the head and carries the coulter. Finally a block of wood known as the rest is secured to the right side of the head and has above it a nine-inch mould board. The plough horses had no bits or reins, and the outfit needed two men, one to hold and one to drive. It was often necessary for a third hand to walk alongside "with a strong stick bearing on the beam to keep the plough in the ground."

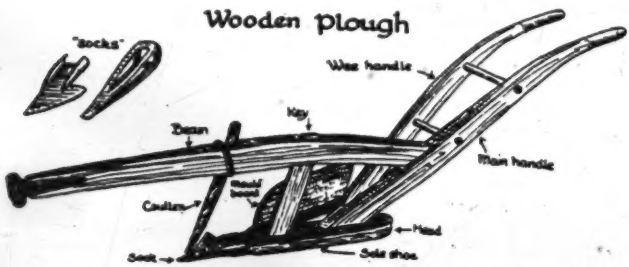

Fig. 43.

The wooden plough was lighter than the all-iron plough, and was considered to break the earth better than the smooth share and curved breast of the swing plough which took its place, but it did not effectively turn the sods: the so-called mould-board did little more than prevent some of the soil from falling back into the furrow. Yet this is the "new wooden plough" which in Donegal replaced only a century

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

241 ago a still simpler plough described as a " crooked stick armed
●407 with a bit of iron," which must have been in no way different, apart from " the bit of iron," from the plough of the Bronze Age. In fact there were wide areas where a plough of any
[412] kind was practically unknown, and it must be admitted that in the small stoney fields of the west the spade is much more serviceable. It is still the only implement used on hundreds of small farms, and at best the spade had to supplement the old types of plough around the headlands and among the stones and rocks. Moreover the wooden plough left the ground so uneven that lumps had to be broken with a maul or " mell " (Fig. 44) and holes filled in with the spade to prevent the seed being " lost." This process was known in Co. Antrim as " mannering." Cross-ploughing seems to be an old Irish custom and helps to explain why the field system is rectangular in contrast to the long strips of ploughland associated with the heavy English wheeled plough.

Fig. 44.

In preparing ground whether for corn or potatoes the practice was to plough the land in narrow ridges varying in width from about 4 to 12 sods (say 3½ to 10 feet) according to the depth and nature of the soil. The furrow or " sheugh " between the ridges would be some two feet wide. This was scraped with the plough but not turned, and it provided the earth for shovelling on the ridges after the seed had been sown. " An old ridge in the ground," runs an Irish saying, " outlives three yews " ; and indeed ancient cultivation ridges can be seen at all but the highest levels and have been observed underneath bogs when they are cut away. The plough ridges

Fig. 45.

Old cultivation ridges and remains of rath, Scrabo, Co. Down.

492 246 ing the hay to the haggard presents itself, quick advantage can be taken of the weather by transporting the cocks as single loads by the simple process of putting a rope round the bottom and hauling them with a horse or two to the haggard. I have also seen a long iron runner placed under the cock, [493] which is thus " sliped " home, but on larger farms a hay-cart is employed. The Irish hay-cart is a specialized vehicle, used for no other purpose : its low platform can be backed against the cock, which is then drawn on to it by a winding gear. This is an interesting example of the versatility which the Irish have shown in developing the two-wheeled cart, their primary mode of transport (Chapter 12). When other horse-drawn [407] implements are employed in hay-making they are frequently old-fashioned in their sturdy simplicity, for example the wooden hay rake or " sweep " with its long ash teeth.

246 In the haggard (" hay-guard ") the stacks are built on prepared foundations of stones and heather or bushes which " draw the wind in under." Sometimes one sees them built [171] around an upright pole, as in the Tyrol and elsewhere abroad. The stacks are either circular (" pikes " in Co. Antrim) or oblong (" havels ") : there are advantages and disadvantages attaching to both shapes and it is doubtful whether, as has been suggested, there is any correlation with regional house-shapes and types. But local styles and methods of finishing the stack need working out. The rush thatch is secured by hay-ropes crossed and recrossed in various patterns or applied as a continuous spiral (Fig. 51).

248 Flax, probably one of the oldest Irish crops, was grown very widely before the Industrial Revolution brought a concentration in the north-east. Small patches are still grown in Donegal for the sole purpose of providing the thatch, the tradition of flax cultivation surviving long after the home industries of spinning and weaving died out. Though mechanical pullers are now being adopted, the flax crop, which must be drawn out, roots and all, is one that lends itself to [476] hand labour. Teams of 8 or a dozen pullers—and sometimes as many as thirty—work together, the men being exchanged or "swapped" between neighboring farms, and a day of flax-pulling traditionally ended with dancing.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

Ireland. Barrett, Burke, Carey, Joyce, M'Andrew, Walsh, and probably Williams (if it be, as is alleged, a form of Mac William or Mac Quillin). [551]

(c.) The immigrants from Ulster come next, amongst whose descendants are said to be the O'Donnells, Connells, Doghertys, Gallaghers, Geraghtys, Reillys (from Cavan), and perhaps M'Loughlins.

(d.) The Mac Cormicks came into the district in the reign of James I.

(e.) Last come names of English origin, the most ancient of which seems to be Bingham, dating from the reign of Elizabeth. Tollet, and probably Dixon, are names of descendants of the Shane settlers. The other English names are of shorter standing, and some of them may really be anglicised local surnames.

The names of the English settlers signed to the petition to Sir Henry Bingham, sometime in the reign of Queen Anne, are Higginbotham, Maxwell, Dennistoun, Linney, Langford, Tollett, Houston, Parker, Gamble, Calwell, and Low; of these, Tollett is the only one now found in the parish, if Gammell be not a corrupted form of Gamble.[1]

IV.—Sociology.

1. *Occupations.*—Excluding the inhabitants of the little town of Belmullet, in which most of the tradesmen reside, the people are, as a rule, either fishermen or farmers, or they combine both occupations. There are a few large holders and proprietors, but the majority of the farms are of small size. These holdings are but poorly fenced, a frequent cause of dispute. Fences are usually earthen or turf, but on the islands dry stone walls, such as are seen in Aran, are common. The principal crops are barley, oats, rye, and potatoes. All the farming is rude and primitive. Spade labour is practically universal, the spades being of modern form, as the old "gowel"[2] or "gowel-gob," a two-bladed or forked wooden spade formerly used here, has long been extinct. [463] [241] [351] [412]

In 1834 there were only 3 ploughs and the same number of carts in use in the Mullet: now (1895) the number of ploughs is 30, and of carts 63. [407] [493]

[1] Though these settlers are spoken of as English by the various writers who have mentioned the colony, yet the majority of these surnames appear to be Scotch.

[2] A specimen of this curious agricultural implement is figured in the Catalogue of Antiquities of the Royal Irish Academy.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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121
178
[412]
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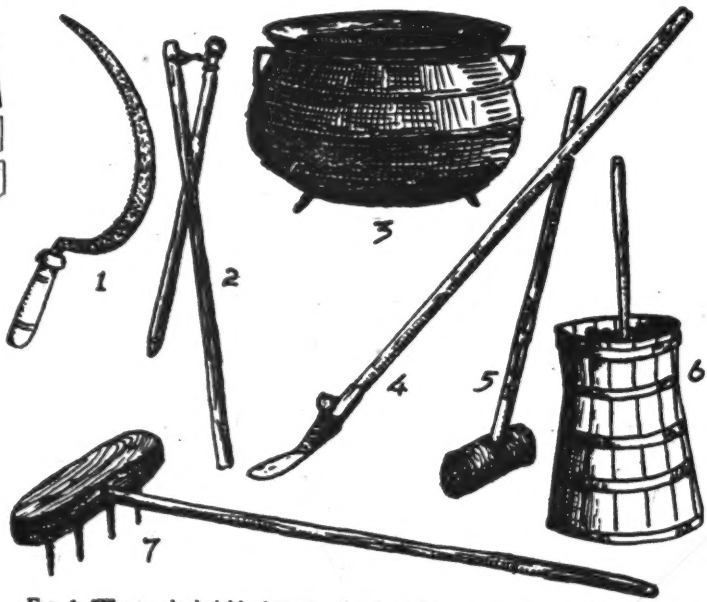

FIG. 1. 'The toothed sickle (1), the flail (2), the one-eared spade (4), the clod-breaking mallet (5), and seek-rake (7), the upright churn (6), and the three-legged pot (3), can all be closely matched in illustrations of English medieval rural life.'

district to another. The interest of these relics is enhanced when one discovers parallels among simple societies in distant parts of the world.

These ancient diversities are being ironed out at an increasing rate, and the opportunity of seeing and, what is more important, placing on record these age-old crafts and rites will soon pass. The wonder is that so many have persisted through the political, economic and social upheavals of the last 150 years. During that period the steady decline of the Gaelic language resulted in the loss of a great deal of information on local and regional life and of a vast store of oral literature, in which the lore of an ancient civilization was enshrined. The scientist must regard this loss as a tragedy comparable to that suffered by the historian in the disastrous burning of the Dublin Four Courts in

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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234 407 Bad luck could not always be avoided, but at least it was desirable to make the toil less wearisome, and to this end a number of ingenious fittings were applied to the churn staff. Most of the examples I have seen, in the north-east, depend on the recoil of a strong spring to lift the staff, and they may well have been evolved from a spring pole, such as is used for the pole lathe, attached to the roof timbers.[1] Other devices enabled the staff to be moved in both directions by an arrangement of levers hinged to a couple-baulk. These engines, which have almost entirely gone out of use, were known as glaiks (Fig. 31).

[415]

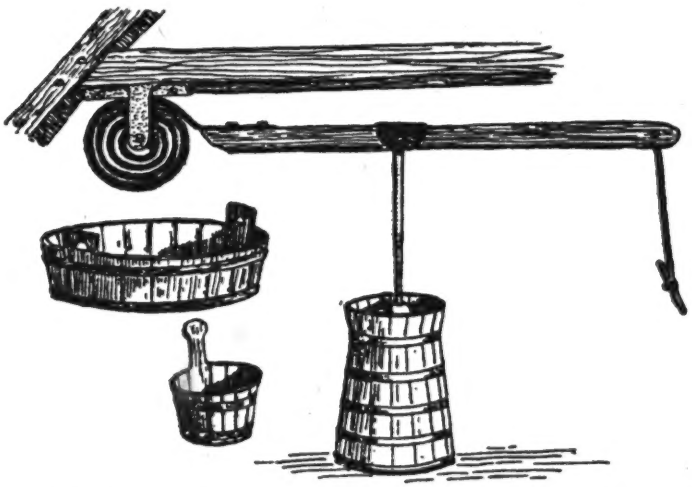

FIG. 31. Glaiks for churning, Co. Down, with milk 'keeler' and piggin, Co. Donegal.

353 788 Here we may mention other things which were hung from the roof timbers: in the more prosperous homes sides of bacon and portions of the autumn-killed ox, the mart; in poorer houses the salted ling or other 'kitchen'. And there was a strange custom of keeping in the roof, to bring luck to the livestock, part of a carcase, such as an animal's leg. This undoubtedly had its origin in the days when living-room and byre were under

[1]For another device, fitted to the churn, see my *Mourne Country*, Fig. 84.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

412 The Irish spade is not a digging implement: it is essentially a ridge-maker or hand-plough, adapted to the business of undercutting and turning the sod. Its narrow bent blade is ill fitted to the lifting of soil, and for this purpose the long-handled shovel is used, an efficient implement for lifting loose earth and placing it with precision where required, for example to fill holes on the ridges. The Irish spade is more specialized and more primitive than the 'common or garden' English spade (Fig. 41).

● 407 412 The evidence of the Irish Law Texts and the discovery of plough coulters on sites of pre-Norman date show that heavy

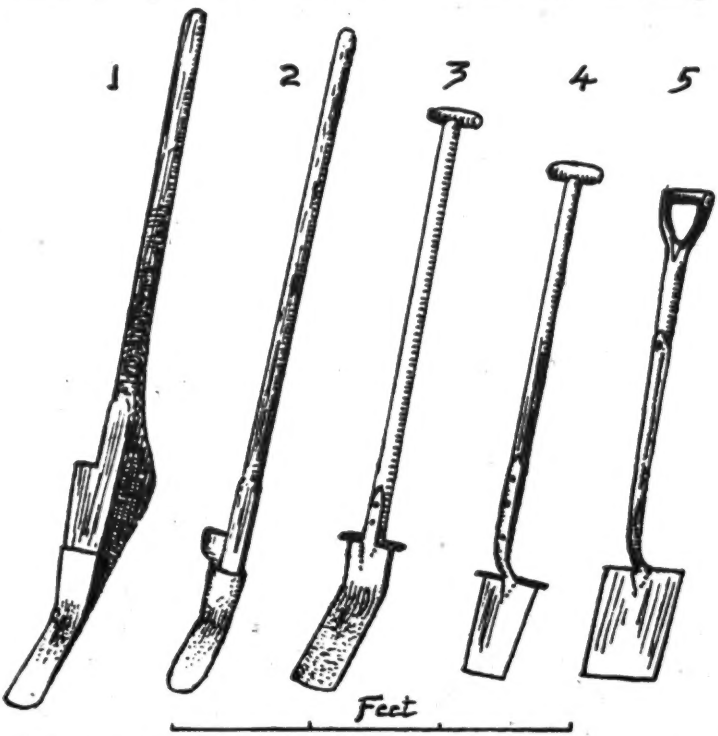

FIG. 41. Spades. The five examples form an approximate evolutionary series. (1) Loy, Co. Leitrim. (2) One-eared spade, Kerry. (3) Two-eared bent ridging spade, Fermanagh. (4) Treaded garden spade, Wexford. (5) English spade

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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ploughs were known in parts of Celtic Ireland, but the light plough or *ard* almost certainly prevailed, and it is unlikely that ploughs of any kind were employed outside the 'few favoured acres' of the infield. A light plough, at any rate, would be unfit to break the tough sod of the outfield, which was allowed to rest for long periods. Even today the answer I have been given when I have asked ridgemakers in old outfield why they were using spades has been: 'Tis too tough for the plough!' Ploughing 'by the tail', similarly, becomes intelligible only if one envisages it as restricted to infield cultivation. The iron plough with curved mould board did not reach the outlying corners of the country until late in the nineteenth century, and down to the time of the famine iron ploughs were used only in progressive areas where there were improving landlords. The prototype of these ploughs was the Scottish two-horse swing plough invented by James Small about the year 1765. By the end of the century it had reached Ireland (and also Norway) and it was a powerful instrument in breaking down the archaic system of openfield husbandry. The Irish were amazed when they first saw a ploughman with a Scots plough both driving the horses and holding the stilts.[1]

Under the traditional system ploughing was 'merely marking the land with furrows'[2]: a spade or mattock was commonly needed to turn back the earth, and to force the share into the ground it was often necessary to have a man walking alongside the plough, pressing down on the beam with a stout stick. No bits or reins were used, and the plough itself required two men or a man and a boy, 'one to hold and one to drive', that is one holding the plough stilts and the other leading the horses by walking backwards before them. Evidently the man at the handles needed to give all his attention to the plough. It was, as a Cavan man described it to me, a process of 'jerking up and down'. Many of these practices were probably taken over from the days of ox-teams. Ploughing with oxen is believed to have died out in late medieval times, though it was reintroduced by some landowners in the late eighteenth century. The small farmer did not use oxen for the plough because unlike horses

[1] R. Thompson, *Meath* (1802), 111.
[2] I. Weld, *Roscommon* (1832), 656.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

407 241 they could not be put to other purposes such as going to the fair.

[231] The wooden plough has now been almost entirely replaced by the iron plough, but in many districts a wooden plough, often converted from a lea plough, is preferred for opening drills (Fig. 42). The potato growers of the kingdom of Mourne in Co. Down, for example, find that it suits their stony soils and is less likely to be damaged by boulders. The rough wooden mould-boards carry the earth with them and distribute it more evenly than the iron drill-plough, which tends, moreover, to 'put a skin' on the soil and to pile up pointed ridges which would require to have their tops flattened later.

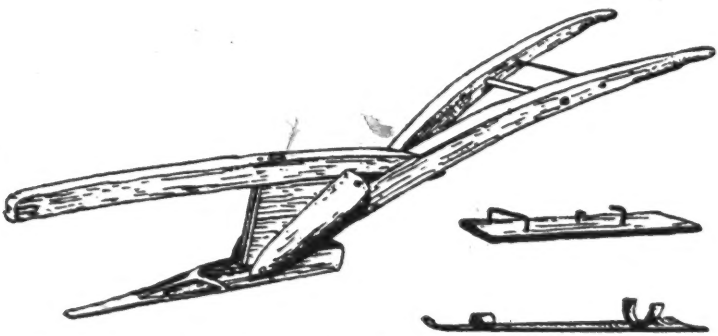

FIG. 42. Wooden drill plough and plough slides, Co. Down: the lower slide is of iron.

The improved wooden plough did not reach remote hill regions until roads were built after the middle of the eighteenth century. Even in the nineteenth century it is described as a newcomer in Co. Donegal, where spade labour had previously [412] been supplemented only by 'a crooked stick armed with a bit of iron, with a second stick grafted to it to give two handles'.[1] This archaic implement must have resembled the wooden 'ard' (araire) of Mediterranean lands. It was so light that when the improved wooden plough with mould-board was introduced into Donegal the ponies were not equal to the task of pulling it. In west Cork the new wooden ploughs were not to be

[1] John Hamilton, *Sixty Years Experience as an Irish Landlord*, 47.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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seen on the small farms until after the Great Famine: 'the things called ploughs would only scratch the surface, a log of wood sharpened and shod with iron'.[1] This 'poorer sort of plough' was made of alder in Co. Londonderry.[2] Observers attributed the Irish addiction to cross-ploughing to the fact that the ribs of unploughed land could only be broken by this means. Small squarish cultivation plots and fields are a natural consequence of cross-ploughing.

It seems that even these light ploughs, quite incapable of penetrating lea ground, were pulled by three or four horses abreast, 'so weak and small are the horses'.[3] Thus 'coaring' (coaration) was necessary, though one suspects that tradition rather than need lay behind the large teams. In the seventeenth century four horses abreast pulled the plough by the tails in Co. Clare, 'which was the custom all over Ireland. The tackle and traces being made of gadds or withies of twigs twisted, would be broken to pieces otherwise . . . But the horses being sensible stop until the ploughman lifts the plough over the rock.'[4] At the same time we find complaints from the midland counties that the native plough was 'heavy and unmanageable, distressing to men and horses.[5] Here we probably have to deal with the descendant of the heavy Anglo-Norman plough.

Unfortunately we have no details of the Irish *ard*. One would like to know, for instance, whether it turned the furrow or rather threw the earth—for it merely scratched the soil—to the left or to the right. It has been found that in certain parts of western Europe left-sided ploughs are traditional whereas, of course, the common plough is almost universally right-sided. Mr. Robert Aitken has traced the left-sided plough in a clearly defined area of south France and north-east Spain.[6] The explanation may be that in these areas cultivation was originally done with a foot plough, for which the right foot was used, so that the soil, as with the Scottish caschrom, was turned to the left, and that the plough when adopted became a traction-

[1] W. Bence Jones, *A Life's Work in Ireland* (1880), 20.
[2] G. V. Sampson, *Memoir* (1814), 290.
[3] W. Shaw Mason, 2 (1816), s.v. Sligo.
[4] *Dineley's Tour in Ireland* (1661), Ed. J. Graves, (1870), 162.
[5] W. Shaw Mason, 2 (1816), s.v. King's Co. and Queen's Co.
[6] R. Aitken, *Man*, 1953, 286.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

407 version of the foot-plough. This is an almost unexplored field
241 of rural history. Mr. Aitken is of the opinion, however, that the left-sided plough goes with the use of the right hand as holding hand.

412 At any rate it is interesting to find that in Ireland the majority
241 of diggers use the right foot, and although in theory the wooden foot-rest of the native one-eared spade can be fitted either to left or right of the narrow blade it is, in the west, almost invariably on the right side. Presumably only habitually left-handed people use the left foot. In eastern Ireland, on the other hand, and particularly in the Protestant districts of the north-east, the left foot is normally the digging-foot, though judging from the proportions of right to left (about one to three in the north-east), the old Irish stocks continue to dig with the right foot. Hence there is a basis of fact in the phrase 'digging
[539] with the wrong foot'. (To say that someone digs with the other
[798] foot is in Ireland an oblique way of referring to his religious faith.) The old Irish spade, we have seen, is a highly specialized tool. It may have been preceded by some kind of hoe or planting stick such as are represented today by the graffan or the steeveen which we describe in the following chapter.

174 We have no direct evidence of Bronze Age ploughs in Ire-
407 land, though marks of furrows have been observed underneath burial barrows of that period in Jutland and Holland and it has
412 been claimed that the *ard* had reached the west Baltic region before the end of the Neolithic phase. However this may be the sod-cutting spade, which could be supplemented by the wooden shovel, is not likely to have been introduced much before the beginning of the Christian era, since it required an efficient knowledge of iron-working. By facilitating the building of ridges it would have improved crop yields during a climatic period, the sub-Atlantic, which was even wetter than at present. A mould-board plough capable of forming ridges did not reach Ireland on present evidence until about the seventh century, and as we have seen it had not been adopted in parts of the west until the nineteenth century. Thus the narrow spade, coming into use at about the same time as oats, would have been a factor in stabilizing settlement by permitting ridge cultivation on the outfield grazing ground round about. This is speculative,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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but it is at least clear that with the introduction of the potato in the seventeenth century it was the spade that facilitated the breaking-in of rough pasture by means of 'lazy-beds', and so made possible the great expansion of cultivation and population in the century before the Great Famine. To this day the one-eared spade, in endless variety, has kept its medieval simplicity and diversity, though it is fast disappearing in favour of the two-eared spade. It may still be seen in the west and south, and a heavy variety is at home in the upper Shannon basin, in the counties of Leitrim, Sligo, west Cavan, Longford, and Roscommon. This is the loy (Fig. 41) a veritable foot-plough with a massive heavy handle expanding on one side into a foot-ledge and below into a stout heel which acts as a pivot when the undercut sod is being turned over in ridge-making. 'This machine they prefer to ploughs', wrote McParlan.[1] Seasoned old men will tell you that they couldn't make ridges unless they had a loy, and they add, scornful of the rising generation, that 'the young people going nowadays couldn't carry a loy'. There was much opposition to the light two-eared spades when they made their appearance in the early nineteenth century. They were objected to above all because, the diggers not wearing boots—the native shoe was at best a flimsy raw-hide cover—the iron would cut their feet. To this day the Irish two-eared spade is distinguished from the English spade by having iron foot-plates (Fig. 41).

The metal spade probably began its life as a mere cutting edge of iron attached to the mouth of a narrow wooden spade. It is still little more than an attachment to a wooden shaft, consisting of an open iron socket which folds around the end of the shaft and passes at an angle into a strong narrow blade. I regard the loy as the most primitive type because the pivot or 'lift' is largely in the heel of the wooden shaft or 'tree', whereas in the rather lighter Munster spade—variants of which are also found in Kilkenny and Galway—the whole pivot is provided by the bent blade. The Longford-Cavan loy, which is adapted to heavy glacial or peaty soils, is a very clumsy digging tool, though well adapted for sod-turning. In experienced hands the loy 'would go in of itself' thanks to its weight and the expanded

[1] J. McParlan, *Leitrim* (1802), 25.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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241 412 width, and it is here that the long-handled shovel comes into its own. In Britain such a shovel, which remains characteristic of south-west England, is of at least Roman antiquity. Specimens from the Roman period are, however, made entirely of wood, and several similar shovels of unknown age have been found in the Irish bogs (Fig. 47). In the west, down to famine times, the common shovel was made of a single piece of wood, usually willow, shod with a narrow strip of iron along the edge.[1]

FIG. 47. Long-handled shovels used for finishing the ridges. The wooden one was found at Glenoe, Co. Antrim.

241 [407] In some districts potato ridges are made with the plough, either with an ordinary lea-plough or else with a special paring-plough, fitted with a wide sock, which reproduces the special feature of the lazy-bed, that is, it does not break the grass of the bed but inverts a wide sod on to it from either side. In both instances the trench is then broken up by a plough with the mould board removed to provide earth for shovelling on to the ridges. The much wider corn ridges were normally made with the plough, except in those retarded mountainy districts where the plough seems never to have been adopted. Wheat was grown on narrower ridges, some five to seven feet wide. In Co. Londonderry it was customary to plough a 'rid-hint', that is, to take a second furrow out of the subsoil of the trench to facilitate drainage.[2] We can readily picture the arable land as eighteenth century observers saw it, with 'the strips piled high and the furrows scraped bare'. Lazy-beds vary in width according to local conditions and conventions and may be as little as

[1] W. R. Wilde, *Catalogue* (1857), 207.
[2] G. V. Sampson, *Memoir* (1814), 282.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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241 west, for it means that the ridges can be prepared beforehand as opportunity offers. What is known as the Munster mode of planting 'with the back of the spade' is to thrust the narrow spade through the inverted top sod and drop the set behind the blade as it is levered forward. On the average three rows of potatoes go to each bed, but there are also one- two- and four-set ridges.

241 412 A special wooden dibber known as the steeveen, kibbin (little spade) or gugger is employed for planting in Cavan, Leitrim and Longford and may perhaps be correlated with the heavy loy as another archaic tool which has kept its hold in that area. The steeveen with its conical head (Fig. 48) will break through the toughest sod and open a way for the young sprouts. Typi- [462] cally 'guggering' is woman's work, the children following, [857] dropping in the sets and closing the hole with a fork or a mell. I like to think that the steeveen is descended from that universal tool of the women of humble cultivating societies, the digging or planting stick, remote ancestor of the spade. It is a plausible theory that the crops of wheat and barley sown by the first Irish cultivators were planted in this way in the ashes of burnt woodland on the mountainsides. Larger dibbers or 'stamps' with several teeth for planting corn were used until quite recently in some counties, for example Armagh (Fig. 49).

● [407]

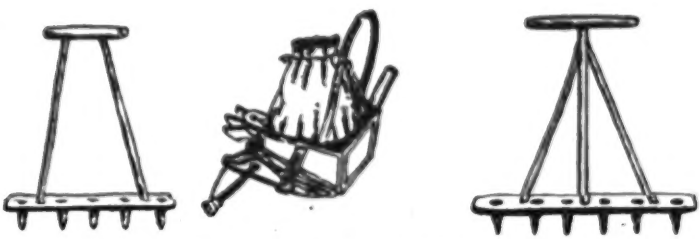

FIG. 49. Dibbers and (*centre*) sowing fiddle, Co. Armagh.

They are probably the descendents of specimens introduced by English 'planters' of the early seventeenth century. It is the [539] dibberhole which is referred to in the rhyme which has outlived the action it once accompanied:

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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241
[539]

LAZY-BEDS

Four seeds in a hole,
One for the rook
One for the crow
One to rot
And one to grow.

[407]

The sowing fiddle which scatters seed broadcast and which may frequently be seen in use in some districts, for example Co. Down, is another introduction from England which has survived here longer than in its presumed home (Fig. 49). The fiddler makes a striking figure, seen from a distance, as he strides steadily up and down the field with his silent instrument; he must beware of changing his pace whether going uphill or downhill or the crop will grow in uneven strips.

In many parts of the world burning of the vegetation is a necessary preliminary to shifting cultivation, and the use of fire in the preparation of the outfield for ridge cultivation therefore raises some interesting questions. We know that the burning of sods pared from rough pasture, sometimes called 'denshiring' from its reputed Devonshire home, was widely practised in Ireland down to the time of the famine. In the early nineteenth century nine-tenths of the potatoes grown in Co. Clare were planted on burnt land,[1] and a special skinning plough was used to pare off the sod. Elsewhere the graffan and flachter were put to a like purpose. From a description of Donegal in 1880 it seems that the drying and warming of the soil were regarded as more important than the fertilizing ashes: 'There is on the fresh bogs a process of heating resorted to in the Spring, i.e., the end of April and the first half of May: the piles of earth are never allowed to burn out into a fire but combustion is kept stopped up within the mass . . . the heated earth, not ashes, is scattered and the first crop put in.'[2] Where the land was of fairly good quality only the furrow sods were burnt. They were stood on edge to dry and then burnt in piles on the ridges, after which the ashes were spread and the potato sets planted in them, to be covered with earth dug from the trenches in the usual way.[3] The process of paring and burning seems to

[1] H. Dutton, *Clare* (1808), 56.
[2] *Report of the Royal Commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act, 1881* (1887), Appendix B, 137.
[3] R. Thompson, *Meath*, 272.